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CHAPTER IX
THE POSITION OF THE WOMEN

RANKS AND OFFICES

IT speaks for the consistency of the political system of Nupe that the position of the women, too, should be drawn into its orbit and even into the framework of official grades and ranks. Among the women of royal blood in pre-Fulani Nupe three women's ranks existed: *Nimwoye*, *Sagi*, and *Wogbo*. Precedence and succession in these three ranks corresponded to the succession in the three highest *gitsú* titles. At the court of ancient Nupe the titles were bestowed by the king on his mother or father's sister, elder sister, or daughter. The holder of the title had to be a *nyizagi gbakó*, a 'strong woman', that is, a woman of about 40–50 years. She had to be unmarried, or else her marriage would be formally dissolved on her appointment to the rank, and she would forthwith be regarded as unmarried. She lived, not in the house of her husband or father but in the *Etsu*'s own house. The Fulani adopted the first two ranks, abandoning, however, the condition of celibacy or nominal celibacy, and made the two daughters of Manko the first *Sagi* and *Nimwoye*. The two ranks have remained in the royal house of Nupe since then. After the split of the dynasty into three branches the women's ranks followed the new dynastic division, the title *Nimwoye* being assigned to the women of the royal house of Masaba, and the title *Sagi* being taken, in rotation, by the women of the royal houses of Umaru and Usman. This rule still holds good: the present *Sagi*, for example, is a sister of the late *Etsu* Bello of the house of Usman, and the *Sagi* before her was an elder sister of the *Shaba*, of the house of Umaru.

The women rank-holders occupied an extremely influential position at the court. They took part in the king's council, they could join in the war with their own troops of slaves and serfs, they held fiefs and owned land. Theirs was the position of 'kings over the women of Nupe'. Although these political prerogatives have disappeared, the position of authority vested in these women's ranks is unimpaired. All quarrels between women, especially women of the noble families, are brought before them; the women of Bida and the villages send them presents and receive counter-presents from them, much as is the custom between the noblemen of Nupe and their king. *Sagi* and *Nimwoye* are often the official representatives of the court at the family feasts of the Bida nobility. At the name-giving ceremony which was celebrated in the house of the *Shaba* in 1936 the *Sagi* came to bring presents and congratulations from the *Etsu*—an honour which was duly appreciated by all who were present.

Among the Bida women of low birth, the wives and daughters of commoners, we find another women's rank, *Sonya*.[1] She is, as the Nupe

[1] The Nupe word *Sonya* corresponds to the Hausa word (and the equivalent women's rank) *sarauniya*, lit. queen. *Sō* or *So* is a Nupe root meaning head or chief.

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put it, the '*Sagi* of the poor'; what the royal princesses do for the women of the nobility the *Sonya* does for the women of her own class: she advises them and arbitrates in their quarrels, taking, however, the more serious cases to the *Sagi*. The *Sonya* might almost be called a female officer of state. All large-scale women's work that is done in Bida by order of the king is organized and supervised by her—for example, the beating of the floors in the houses of the king and the royal nobility. The *Sonya* is, above all, entrusted with the supervision of the market. She is elected by the Bida women who are regular traders on the market, and her rank is confirmed by the *Etsu*. The respect and deference with which all Bida women greet their *Sonya* illustrates the importance of her position. Formerly she was a royal fief-holder on a small scale, holding land of her own; she was also allowed to levy a small due on all business transacted on the market. Of this levy the *Sonya* returned one-third to the *Sagi* or *Nimwoye* as a symbol of her submission to the highest authority of these royal princesses over the women of Bida. To-day, the *Sonya* is still supervising the market and the work of the women. She has kept her status and her official position as well: for she has been made an official of the Native Administration and granted a small salary.

In every Nupe village, finally, we find a titled 'head of the women', called *Sagi*, like the royal princess in Bida. She is usually a woman about or over 50. She is elected by the married women of the village and her appointment is confirmed by the chief. In larger villages there may be a *Shaba Sagi* as well, an appointed successor to the headship of the women. The title *Sagi* itself seems to be of comparatively recent origin and was probably, like many other village titles, copied from the Bida rank system. The original title which it replaced was *Lelu*. This title, though no longer used, was explained to me in most villages to be the exact equivalent of the modern title *Sagi*. Yet this is not quite true: with the change in the title a subtle change in the significance of the rank has taken place. As I have described elsewhere, the Nupe chiefs used to bestow the rank *Lelu* on the woman who was believed to be the most powerful witch in the village. Her secret knowledge could thus be made to benefit the interests of the community. Turned into an organ of village administration, this woman could be used, in the opinion of the people, to check and control the subversive activities of the other witches.[1] With regard to witchcraft, then, the Nupe have adopted the proverbial policy of making a (reformed) criminal chief of police, or rather an imaginary criminal controller of an imaginary crime. Their belief in the efficiency of this measure has not changed. Yet the curtailed power of the present-day village chief, who is no longer free to act upon the advice of his female 'controller of witchcraft'; the general fear in the country, born of the experiences in the witchcraft trial in 1932, even so much as to mention the word witch or witchcraft; and in certain places also the growing importance of other more prosaic business for the head of the women, have all contributed to suppress the magical aspect

[1] See *Africa*, 1935, 4.

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of the office of the village *Sagi* and to emphasize its harmless business side instead.

Thus we find that in many Nupe villages an efficient business-like head of the women has succeeded the *Leku* or *Sagi* of the old type. In other places, again, the people would not admit the magic significance of the woman's rank. Yet the strength of the belief, concealed though it may be, was shown in a witchcraft case which I happened to witness in Gbajibo, a small village on the Niger above Jebba. Here the *Sagi*, the very business-like head of the local women, was yet behind the public outcry against an alleged witch. The women much more than the men were leading in this persecution; they had been the first to ostracize the victim; and when I questioned them about their motives, they all referred me to the *Sagi*. Her own motive appeared to be jealousy of the other woman, the alleged witch, in whom she saw a dangerous rival, possibly even for the position of a *Sagi*.

The office of the *Sagi*, modern or traditional, is invariably a much-coveted one. Her moral hold over the women, as our example has shown, is complete. It is equally strong in the less sinister spheres of communal life: like the *Sonya* in Bida, the village *Sagi* advises the women, organizes women's work, arbitrates between them, and receives small presents from every business transaction which they carry through.

MARRIAGE AND STATUS

The ranks and offices already discussed all belong to married women. But we have seen that they represent forms of status which the women acquire in their own right, on the grounds of descent, or personal ability, or both, independent of their status as wives of men who occupy this or that social position. We shall see later that the same principle applies also to the status won by wealth. In particular the status by descent of the Nupe women is affected but little by marriage, i.e. by the social status of their husbands; in so far as it is so affected, this change is in the direction of social advancement. Women of low birth who marry above their status into the aristocracy can claim the status of their husbands; and women who marry beneath their station do not lose their status but raise their husbands to their own social level. The men will be allowed to share most of the social and political privileges of the class into which they marry. Two cases were reported to me in which the men could even acquire *saraki* ranks after marrying a woman of the *saraki* nobility. But even if the men are not admitted fully into the titled class, their children would always acquire the status of their mother. Daughters may thus inherit the status of their fathers, and both sons and daughters that of their mothers; husbands may be adopted into the social sphere of their wives and parents-in-law. This social regulation may seem surprising in an otherwise strongly patrilineal society. But this one-sided interpretation of the change of status that goes with marriage is not an expression of matrilineal kinship tendencies, nor of 'feminist' leanings in Nupe society (though we shall find ample evidence of these, too); rather it expresses political

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interests, deep-seated class sentiments, which cannot admit of a lowering of status in any one high-born. Yet if, owing to the rigid class system, marriage between the classes is thus turned into a potential instrument of social advancement, its utilization in this sense is also rigidly controlled.

For marriage in the aristocracy, especially in the royal nobility, is to very large extent endogamous—'family marriage' as the Nupe call it. As the Nupe-Fulani regard themselves all as related, and as most families of the nobility are more or less closely related by marriage, practically all 'family marriages' of this kind are at the same time marriages within the ruling class. The Fulani in Nupe, moreover, following Mohammedan practice, encourage parallel cousin marriage (which is forbidden by the traditional marriage rules of the country) as well as cross-cousin marriage, and thus widen enormously the scope of 'family marriages', especially between descendants in the male line. Family marriage in Nupe, finally, is characterized by a much lower bride-price than that paid in ordinary exogamous marriage. This leads to the rather paradoxical situation, on which my informants invariably commented, that the wealthiest and proudest classes of the country favour 'cheap' marriage, while the humble commoners and peasants are committed mostly to a very high bride-price. The explanation is that the low bride-price in this case supplies an additional incentive for endogamous marriage—'class endogamous' marriage, as it were—and thus for the preservation of the social identity of the ruling classes (as well as, incidentally, a strengthening of their group solidarity).[1]

Indeed the counterpart of the incentive of a low bride-price in 'class endogamous' marriages is the 'deterrent' of an exceptionally high bride-price demanded in the case of marriages between the classes, i.e. between men of the *tálaka* class and girls or women of the nobility. Such cases are accordingly rare. Yet we may note that if a chance of such marriage exists, if the girl loved the man sufficiently to overlook the difference in social status, the high bride-price alone proves no obstacle. For friends and relations would join forces to find the money and to enable the ambitious suitor to make his luck by this advantageous marriage. The benefits of his new position would be considered sufficient promise of an eventual ample gratification. One of my Bida servants was an example: the son of a commoner, he had succeeded in winning the love of the daughter of a very high *saraki* and eventually, after considerable difficulties, in marrying her with money borrowed from friends and relations.

The endogamous marriage rules only ensure that the women of the ruling classes should marry within the class; they do not attempt to exclude the less dangerous form of dilution implied in the marriages of the men to women from other classes and strata. Indeed, the polygamous nature of marriage in Nupe, which forces the men to seek wives

[1] One of my informants who belonged to the *saraki* class even went so far as to explain the whole principle of having a different bride-price for 'family' and 'outside' marriages as a political measure taken by the *saraki* and Fulani nobility with the purpose of preventing commoners from marrying into their class. Though incorrect as regards the facts, this interpretation is significant as an expression of the dominant class sentiments.

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Men who have to uphold their prestige and social position would never risk the publicity and ridicule of divorce proceedings in which they would have to appear in the role of the wronged husband.[1] The amorous affairs of Bida noblemen supply, in fact, an ever-welcome topic for the town gossips. When some years ago two popular noblemen quarrelled, everyone knew that it was about a girl and had the details at their fingertips. Only the men of very great wealth and highest status are in a position to restrain or threaten their unfaithful wives. For one thing, they can afford to forfeit more than one bride-price, and can thus divorce their wives (according to Nupe Mohammedan law) without invoking elaborate public proceedings. Besides, wives and paramours would hesitate to provoke the enmity of these powerful personages. It is not unnatural, then, that (as my informants said) the wives of these men supply the only example of unimpaired marital fidelity in Bida—another no less striking instance of 'double morality'.

If the older married men are either resigned or complacent, the younger men see in illegitimate adventures only an exciting and tempting aspect of Bida life. We shall meet later with their ideal, the dashing young man 'about town' who can 'have' all the women he wants and can boast of his conquests. The women who avails herself of the loosened marriage ties may be talked about and called (behind her back) a 'bad woman'—*nyizagi banza*, a 'worthless woman'. But in their ordinary behaviour towards these women, when meeting them in the street or in the house of a mutual friend, the men will never fail in their respect towards them or betray by a sign their moral prejudices. This ambiguous attitude is symptomatic of a society which, though still conscious of its traditional dogmatic appreciation of chastity, is yet adapting itself to a spreading laxity of morals.

There is indeed evidence to show that sexual licence has been greatly increasing in the last generation or two. But there is also evidence of the fact that sexual licence on a smaller scale and within strictly defined limits enjoyed a legitimate existence in traditional Nupe society. The anomaly of public morals which would condemn sexual licence yet at the same time sanction it in a certain well-defined social domain is familiar to the student of society. In Nupe as in all other societies this qualified admission of sexual licence is due to various social causes. A first cause lies in the nature of sex itself, namely, in the reaction to the restraint on all pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations which characterizes the traditional sex morality of the people. Another cause is the large floating population in Bida, composed of traders, warriors (formerly), labourers (to-day), that is, men who come to Bida without their wives and depend on prostitution for the satisfaction of their sexual appetite. A third cause is embodied in the institution of female trade. We shall see later that women's trade involves a loosening of matrimonial and family ties and tends to become identified with licentious living. In female trade Nupe society thus has grasped a ready occupational framework for that domain of sanctioned

[1] Clear evidence of this is the scarcity of divorce cases, which form two-thirds of all court cases in Bida, from the houses of the nobility.

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sexual licence towards which the other social forces appear to be driving. The result is the close association between professional female trade and semi-professional licensed prostitution which we can observe to-day.

Yet admission into this 'domain' was in turn made dependent upon a certain qualification, namely childlessness. Here we can add a final, ideological motive to the social causes behind the moral development. It is embodied in the Nupe conception of barrenness as a state outside conventional morality, and its contribution is twofold: it helps to define more narrowly the group in which sexual licence shall be sanctioned, by making sterility of the women a criterion of admission; and it provides at the same time the spiritual framework for such social sanction, by linking it with certain religious or quasi-religious beliefs. To some extent the ideological association between barrenness and sexual licence can be reduced to certain obvious rational motives, which are, in fact, present in the minds of the people: childlessness is of great advantage in the life of the women traders whose profession involves constant travelling and long absence from home; moreover, the sexual indiscretions of sterile women are socially of less consequence than those of other women, being comparatively safe from discovery and precluding the more disturbing legal complications (i.e. birth of illegitimate children). But the social interpretation of barrenness also expresses certain more deeply rooted beliefs. To the Nupe marriage has no real meaning without progeny. Barrenness is regarded as a great curse and misfortune, and many cults and forms of magic are designed to secure fertility of the women or to cure barrenness. Traditional religious beliefs place barren women in a category apart and exclude them from participation in the most important annual cult of the country, the *gunnu*.[1] As the barren woman fails by the common standard of marriage and womanhood, she is also exempted from the standards of common morality. Adultery and unchastity count less in her than in other women. And although the stigma of immorality would still attach to the unchaste barren woman (she would still be called a 'worthless woman'), it would be, as it were, overshadowed by and fused with the other paramount stigma of barrenness itself.

The growth of sexual licence far beyond its traditionally sanctioned limits is again due to various causes, economic, political, and religious. The primary cause appears to be economic and will be discussed in that context. Its effectiveness, however, is greatly strengthened by the political and social factors which foster what I have termed the 'double morality' in Nupe society. We can also see that the Nupe conception of barrenness must itself indirectly aid these tendencies and defeat the limitations which it was meant to uphold. For in a country with spreading sterility and even birth restriction, a religion which withholds its sanctions of matrimonial morality in the case of childless women can prove but a weak bulwark against the tide of sexual licence. Mohammedanism in Nupe, committed as it is to that 'double morality', undermines rather than supplies forces of moral restraint.

[1] For a description of this aspect of barrenness see *J.R.A.I.* 1937, p. iii.

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A comparison between sex morality in the town and in the villages will bring the final proof of our interpretation of the social causes of moral laxity and publicly condoned sexual licence. For in the villages, where the political and economic factors to which we have attributed this development are much less conspicuous than in Bida, sexual licence in this sense is absent also. The same informants who declared that there were no 'good women' left in Bida maintained that the opposite was true of the country. Within limits, this is correct. Semi-professional prostitution is absent and adultery is far less frequent than in Bida. Above all, it is not glossed over for fear of publicity and ridicule: it leads to quarrels and frequently to divorce. Nor are illegitimate amorous adventures applauded and bandied about. The more closely knit village life renders sexual promiscuity both more difficult and more risky, and the danger of provoking serious conflicts forces it into the sphere of clandestine and disreputable activities. The ideal of the Bida Lothario is absent in the Nupe village.

It is largely true to say that among the peasant women also the Bida ideal of the glamorous 'fast' woman finds no following. Or, more correctly, it finds no following among the peasant's wives and daughters who have chosen village life. For especially in the larger trading-places there is a certain (increasing) minority of women who leave the village to join the army of 'loose' women traders. However, they do not introduce their ways into village life itself. To quote again from my informants: 'Peasant women are on the whole better wives than our women in Bida. You see it when you come to a village: you will not find women with whom you can sleep. But who would want to sleep with them? They are badly dressed, they do not wash, use no scent, and smell of sweat. There are a few exceptions, though, for example the women in the house of the chief of K.'—referring to a village in which the chief's family was in many ways emulating the standards of Bida life. There is good sense in these cynical (though not cynically meant) remarks. Hard work, lack of leisure, the inability to afford nice dresses or the help of cosmetics, make the peasant woman comparatively unattractive; she ages more quickly than her more fortunate sister in town. It is not surprising that she should come short of the sophisticated urban standards of taste. If the peasant woman thus succumbs less to temptation, it is also true that less temptation comes her way. Having chosen peasant life she can but choose peasant morality also. The different sexual morality in town and village is thus essentially an expression of differences in economic conditions and of inequality of wealth and status.

It is tempting to dwell on this relation between economic and political factors and the attitude of the society towards the problems of sex and morality. There has been the tendency in recent anthropological writings to regard the elaboration of the sex theme in different cultures, the temperamental and personality traits which, in a society, appear associated with sex, as the expression of some ultimate quality in culture itself —the genius or *ethos* of a culture. That women in one society are 'gentle' and 'aggressive' in another, that one culture regards them as masculine workers and another as feminine mothers or partners in love,

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POSSESSION OF LAND

In the discussion of the rights to land obtaining in Nupe two facts must be borne in mind. First, the Fulani conquest, which resulted in the appropriation of part of the vacant tribal land; and second, the very low birth-rate and sparse population of the country. These two factors limit each other's effectiveness; moreover, they affect different parts of the country in different measure. We have seen that the appropriation of tribal land took place only in the area east of the Kaduna (Cis-Kaduna).[1] In the area west of the Kaduna (Trans-Kaduna),[2] land-tenure on the traditional tribal or village basis still obtains, and here the population factor shows itself effective in that it eliminates almost all pressure on the land and all more severe competition for landed possession. Owing to the political factors the opposite is true of Cis-Kaduna, and here a complex system of land ownership and land transfer, which in the extreme case amounts to outright purchase for money, reflects the attempts of the people to counteract the pressure on the land. That land disputes are extremely rare in Trans-Kaduna, but very frequent in the 'conquered' territory, is evidence of the same development. One exception may be mentioned at once: the especially valuable marsh-land groves and plots near river-courses, which the Nupe call *bata* (the Hausa *kurmi*). Disputes about this valuable kind of land occur now and again even in the land-rich Trans-Kaduna, and they are fought with special bitterness in Bida and the crowded 'conquered' territory. The following figures may be quoted in support of this statement: in the years 1934 and 1935 24 cases of land litigation came before the *Etsu*'s Court in Bida; 21 referred to Cis-Kaduna and 3 to Trans-Kaduna; of the latter none was a land case in the narrow sense of the word—one was a dispute about trees, and two were disputes over marsh-land plots.

The description of Nupe land-tenure may start most profitably with an enumeration of the various methods by which a man, stranger or native of Nupe, may acquire land or has been able to acquire land in the past. It must be said first of all that under traditional conditions only men can hold or claim possession of land. The dynastic policy of the Nupe kings has first led to women being invested with fiefs and landed property. Mohammedan law, besides, is inclined to confirm land holding by women in their own right. But the holding of land by women is still extremely rare, and limited to Bida and the surrounding districts I have come across one case only—a court case in which sons and brothers of a recently deceased woman contested the inheritance of her landed property. Needless to say, none of the parties concerned were peasants; the land had been acquired first through the channels of clientship, and the present claimants—Bida Mallams—wanted it only in order to sublet it for profit.

To return to traditional land-tenure. For a Nupe man who comes

[1] The territory between Kaduna and Gbako river, i.e. Beni country, and the districts east of the Gbako river, i.e. Badeggi and Kacha districts.

[2] Trans-Kaduna is the literal translation of the Nupe name for the area: *Lavunkpā* (*Lavun* being the Nupe name for the Kaduna river).

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difference in quality and value to a much greater extent, namely, fruit-bearing trees.

In most districts the chief has a special title to certain economically valuable fruit trees wherever they grow, on vacant land or on people's farms. In Doko and Shebe this special chief's tree is the locust-bean, in Kutigi and Wuna the oil-palm. In Mokwa there exists another regulation, namely, that all shea-nut and locust-bean trees inside the town belong to the chief, while the trees outside are the full property of the man on whose ground they stand. Also there is in many places the general rule that no fruit tree on village land may be cut down without the special permission of the chief. Sometimes family heads exercise a restricted right to the 'chief's trees' growing on their land, i.e. they return two-fifths of the crop to the chief and keep the rest. But the chief may also grant the full possession of these trees as a separate right; thus he bestows the property of a certain number of valuable trees on an individual—young or old—as a recognition of higher civic status, together with the promotion to rank and title. The right to the trees, coupled with the rank, remains the property of the 'house', conditional upon the renewal of the appointment (to the same or a similar rank) after the death of each holder.[1] The shea-nut trees—to-day of considerable commercial importance—occupy everywhere in Nupe a special position. The trees on vacant land (virgin village land or no-man's-land) are common property. The women who collect the fruit go out in small parties and share the crop among them. The shea-nut trees on occupied farm-land belong to the owner of the farm.[2] In either case the exploitation of the crop is the exclusive prerogative of the women.

A few words may be given to a special variety of village land, the plots that are situated in the village itself, round the compounds and between the village *efu*. This land is owned by the people who live in the compounds adjoining the plots. Its inheritance and apportionment is ruled by the same regulations as the inheritance and apportionment of the houses themselves and will best be discussed in a later section. The land inside village and town differs only in one respect from the village land without: it is never left uncultivated. Manured as it is by the refuse from the houses it can be used continuously without the necessity of being left fallow for a period. If the owner of such plots leaves the village or the town and does not return for some time, leaving no one behind (which has happened frequently in Bida during the last twenty years), the neighbours will use the farm-plots; they are always ready,

[1] A certain complication arises when the modern official Village Head is not identical with the traditional chief, for the former may assume control over the land only, not over trees—he may indeed not possess any 'chief's trees' himself, at least not at the time of his appointment. There is no evidence as yet to show how this contradiction will be solved in the course of time—except an indirect evidence to be mentioned presently (see p. 189, n. 2), which tends to show that this separation of land- and tree-rights is allowed to last for several generations.

[2] The facts mentioned here will correct the statement made by some students of West African agriculture, that 'shea-nut trees are generally regarded as entirely common property' (O. T. Faulkner and J. R. Mackie, *West African Agriculture*, 1933, p. 27).

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employed in the beating of the floors of the huts or the platforms in front and between the huts. This work is done in the evenings, when the women have finished their own housework. It has all the elements of the *egbe*: the generous meal awaiting the workers, the singing and dancing—the beating itself is done rhythmically, to the accompaniment of songs (no musical instruments are employed in this or in any of the women's dances), and in its movements the motions of work and dance are attractively combined. The group of women fills the hut to overflowing. They are arranged in concentric circles, pressing closely against each other. Bent low over the floor they beat the ground three times with the heavy wooden flail which they hold in their right hand, then pull themselves up, lift both hands in the air, and take a measured dance step towards the centre and back again, and then bend down once more to resume the beating of the floor. Or they fill this rhythmical pause in the work with the verse of some interminable song, and while singing they move a few steps along in the circle; when the moving ring comes to a halt they bend down to their work, to interrupt it once more in the rhythmical motion of this 'ring-dance'. Nor is the incentive of competition absent in this *egbe* of the women. House-groups compete with house-groups; girls of different age are assigned different tasks: small girls of 6–7 are working slowly and silently on the outskirts of the group; girls of 12 or so are singing with the women and work towards the inside, trying to emulate the speed and ease of the grown-ups; and the adult women, leading in dance and work, spur their teams to almost breathless speed. As they work and dance, closely packed into the small dark hut, stripped to the waist, their bodies glistening with sweat and spattered with mud, beating, singing, stamping, and shouting, they seem to be actors in some exciting savage ritual rather than in ordinary work.

To return to the more prosaic aspects of the division of labour between the sexes, and to the question of the 'compensation' for her contributions to the household which the exploitation of shea-nut trees allows the Nupe woman. The clearly defined attitude of the people with regard to this question of 'compensation' and the economic rights of the women in general is illustrated in the following example. We remember that the roast-ovens in which the shea-nuts are dried before being marketed or manufactured into shea-butter are built by the men. Now, in Leaba I found that the women had to dry shea-nuts in the sun, a much slower and more laborious procedure, as all their ovens were dilapidated and sadly in need of repair. I inquired why the men did not build new ones. The men explained they had no time and money. I suggested, half jokingly, that the men might be given a share in the profits made on the shea-nuts and in return repair the roast-ovens. Whereupon the women, realizing that their own special interests were involved, joined in the discussion, which is interesting enough to be given here word for word.

Women: 'Why should we give the men part of our money? Do we not cook porridge for them?'

I: 'But he gives you the grain for making the porridge.'

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462 *Women*: 'Yes, but *only* the grain. We have to contribute *kula*, *kuka*, salt, pepper and palm-oil.'

562 *I*: 'Surely you have locust-bean trees and red pepper in Leaba?'

Women: 'No, there are no locust-bean trees here, nor pepper.'

One woman: 'This is not true, we have pepper.'

Another woman (rather defiantly): 'Well, there still remains salt, *kula*, and palm-oil for which we, the women, have to pay.'[1]

[423] [1] Another example of the clearly defined economic rights of the women is this: in the Nupe communities in the forest groves on the Niger, where there are no shea-nut trees, the banana is the property of the women and supplies them with fruits which they can dispose of in their own right.

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462 441 snuff and smoking, its modern counterpart, cigarettes, and kola-nuts, although they are used mostly by men. To the second category belong the various products of Nupe fashion industry, rings, bracelets, chains, ladles, glass-ware, beads, and also the low carved stools, made by the carpenters, on which the Nupe women are wont to sit. The products of women's crafts are traded by women, irrespective of their use: thus the women sell cloth woven by women (used chiefly for women's dresses), indigo dye (which may be used by and for the men), native soap and pots, including the pitchers which the men use for ablutions. All goods produced by men and used by men are marketed by male traders: hoes, axes, arms, gowns, straw hats, books, leather-work, &c. Goods used by both sexes are traded by both men and women: for example, mats, and certain kinds of cloth of native or European make. Live stock is always marketed by men, only chickens are sometimes sold on the market by women.

462 441 868 Throughout this description the term 'woman' means married women as well as girls, mothers and wives as well as daughters. Small girls of 6 or 8 will already 'keep shop' in play, sitting behind a basket in which they have arranged a few pebbles, little rags of cloth or cigarette tins filled with sand, and silently display their 'goods', as they have seen their mothers and elder sisters do. Mothers always take their young girls to the market, letting them sit beside them and, if they are big enough, carry some of the loads on the way there and back. Girls of 12 or 13 will assist their mothers or deputize for them when they are called away; or they will take some of the cooked food which the women sell, and walk through the market and adjoining streets, crying out the wares, while the mother remains sitting behind her basket. This is, incidentally, an interesting division of labour between mother and daughter, and old and young trader in general. For it is against the dignity of grown-up [576] women to cry out their wares—only young girls may do that. A girl of 14 or 16 is already fully initiated into the secrets of commerce, and will soon start to trade on her own, with a capital of a few pennies or a small store of grain or ground-nuts given her by her mother. By degrees the capital and the scope of her business will grow. I remember a court case in Bida in which two girls, between 14 and 15 years of age, had been summoned because they had fought on the market. The fight was about a piece of cloth which one girl had taken from the other, agreeing to buy it for a certain amount; but later she declared it to be too dear, and paid only half the agreed price. The price of the cloth was 6*d*., and the people in the court were very amused about this commercial transaction in (as the *Alkali* put it) 'little girl's rags'. However, 'little girl's rags' become real cloth, and even more valuable goods, in the course of time, and when the girl marries she is a fully fledged trader, and fully versed in the art of marketing which will be one of her duties as a married woman. Her earnings remain her own property and cannot during her lifetime be [428 562] touched by her husband. Only when she dies will the husband be entitled to inherit her property.

593 562 This brings us to the question of the economic inequality of husband and wife. It is implied in this division of labour between the sexes which

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makes the women the main traders of the country that the women can as a rule command more liquid capital than the men. In this sense, referring to the liquid resources, it can be said that the Nupe women are on the whole wealthier than the men. This does not mean that their financial position is entirely unaffected by the limited resources of the husband. The wives of small farmers and craftsmen or, generally, impecunious husbands, have little scope for their commercial activities, and may be unable to derive from the household resources the necessary working capital for a profitable independent enterprise. Where there is little to sell there can be little profit; and this small profit may be swallowed up by the normal household expenditure. Even the utensils and goods which constitute the wife's dowry may disappear gradually in a household where there is no money with which to replace the stock of pots, clothes, and ornaments—the woman's initial 'capital' (see p. 351). The household of a diviner in Bida, whom I knew well, was a typical case. The man was of poor health, unable to do any serious work, and had to rely entirely on his income from divining, which was small and irregular. The wife maintained the household, poor and simple as it was. She was about 40 years old; she had nothing left of her dowry save the few rags which she wore, and a few damaged pots. Every day she bought grain for 6*d.* on the market, made corn-gruel and corn-water, and sold this food in the mornings in the street, with a total profit of 2*d.* With this money she kept herself and her husband and a small child.

But usually the wives even of men whom one would hardly call prosperous attain an impressive degree of solvency. Solvency in this connexion is a relative term, as the pecuniary demands which the wives have to meet are much smaller than those which devolve on the men as the heads of the household. Yet in many cases the women come to the succour of their men even in expenses of the latter kind. It is by no means rare, especially in Bida, to find families in which a mother undertakes to pay the bride-price for the sons. Much more widespread is the practice of wives lending their husbands money, for example, for the payment of tax. Of this practice we shall hear more later. Let me emphasize here the dependence of the husband on his wife with regard to these monetary obligations—a dependence which must increase as the independent economic enterprise of the women, commerce, is increasing in scope. This fact is essential for the understanding of certain moral issues involved in the expansion of women's trade in Nupe.

I have stated earlier that the line of distinction between professional and occasional traders is much more fluid among the women than among the men. Wives of farmers, craftsmen, Mallams, noblemen, traders, officials—they all are, or may be, traders. The enormous variety in the trade which is carried out by the Nupe women, and in the degree of their 'professionalization', cannot be reduced to a simple formula. The woman who sells every morning two or three dozen packets of home-made *kamu* (corn-gruel) for a tenth of a penny each, and the woman who buys £5 worth of rice, kola-nuts, or European cloth, do not really differ in anything except in the amount of capital they can lay their hands on. The difference in the distance which they cover when

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disposing of their goods—the peasant woman who walks eight to ten miles to the nearest local market, and the professional woman trader who travels to Lokoja or Ilorin by canoe or train—may seem but an external feature. Yet this factor of distance possesses a deeper significance. The essential difference between the professional and the occasional woman trader is embodied in the extent to which their trading and marketing becomes an independent, self-contained, and self-centred enterprise. Both the occasional and the professional trader are out for profit. But only the latter has adjusted her life fully to this aim. 'Proper' trade necessitates a freedom of movement, a full-time devotion to the task, which only women who have made themselves independent can afford. It means extensive journeys, and long absence from home. Obviously, the wife of a farmer or craftsman who must look after the house is less able to do this than the wife of a trader or a man of the leisured classes.

But the profession demands even more than comparative leisure. The long absence from home, the life on the road, in foreign villages and countries to which none of the normal contacts of the community stretch, means ultimately a dissolution of the bonds of marriage, household, and family. The disappearance of all moral control of the husband over his wife, or the local community over its women, expresses itself in the sexual licence claimed by these women. Female trade and immorality are in Nupe conception two things closely related. The women traders who go on these long expeditions and stay away from home for weeks, months, or even years, are commonly regarded as 'loose' women, as women who cannot help leading a 'loose' and 'immoral' life. The women traders prostitute themselves for money in the villages and towns where they stop on their trading expeditions. The money which they make is regarded by the people as legitimate a form of earnings as that gained from trade itself. When they return to their homes husband and family will receive them without question, and no blame would attach to them for the life which they had been leading while away. Public opinion, though outspoken in its general condemnation of moral laxity, yet countenances the sexual licence of women traders and accepts it almost as an institution. If people—men, as the spokesmen of public opinion—express their indignation at this danger to matrimonial morality, they attack, not the practice itself, but its disproportionate growth in recent times.

We have, in a previous chapter, discussed the social significance of this qualified admission of sexual licence in a certain limited social domain (see Chap. IX). Let me recall the salient facts: female trade, closely associated as it is with licentious living, provided the scope for that socially condoned sexual licence which other social forces seem to have made necessary. Thus female trade became in some respects a closed profession, the entrance into which was made dependent on the qualification of sterility. We may add here that, not unnaturally, women who were past child-bearing age could also legitimately join the profession of women traders. By means of these two qualifications an occupation which harboured some danger to common morality was limited to

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what were (to the society) the least dangerous groups. This limitation is no longer true. But the information which I collected on this point, from every part of the country, and every social stratum, leaves no doubt that the limitation did obtain, and that it is still regarded as the more adequate practice. Formerly, I was told, no peasant would have dreamed of letting his young wife go to distant markets the journey to which would involve spending the night on the road, away from home. Nor did women with children ever leave the home for these long expeditions to foreign parts. To-day, an ever-increasing number of Nupe women, young women and women with children, travel about the country, independent, and unrestricted by village morals. In the large trading-places in the south such as Baro, Lokoja, Ibadan, I have met many—they lived there, some with their children, as well-known traders and as equally well-known prostitutes.

We have learned that this development is due to a variety of social factors. We will discuss here the factors which are embodied in the economic changes, and which, in fact, appear to represent the main moving force. It is difficult to say for certain whether the floating population of wifeless men has considerably increased during the last generation. It seems to have done so. But speaking more generally, the rapid development of trade since the pacification of the country after the Fulani wars and specially after the British conquest cannot be doubted. It appears to have overtaken Nupe society unawares, as it were, without giving it the chance to readjust itself gradually to the new conditions. Trade, in the war-disturbed times of the past an occupation for men who could carry arms, fell now easily to the women. It called for new recruits, and seized upon the existing system of division of labour between the sexes—men as producers, and women as 'middlemen' and traders. Yet this organization, which was designed to fit into the narrow scope of village life, was adapted too readily to the purposes of the new widespread trade that developed in the Emirates. No other system of division of labour and specialization, it appears, could be evolved as quickly to take charge of the new tasks. It could not but disorganize social life. Family organization and the traditional concepts of morality fell victims to economic progress. The profit motive, here as in many other fields of Nupe economy, outstripped and overruled the interests of group cohesion and group stability.

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874 Certain progressive Bida Mallams include the teaching of Hausa and elementary arithmetic in their syllabus, and many adults, traders and other native business men, attend their classes to acquire knowledge so invaluable to their trade.[1] In certain Bida schools you will find young girls being taught together with boys. They come from the families of the nobility, which, conscientious Mohammedans, insist on elementary [562] religious instruction being extended also to women. Girls, however, are only taught the Koran, and do not study 'knowledge'.

Adult students, specially those who study the Koran or 'knowledge' for their edification, following another profession besides, visit the house of the teacher only for their lessons, which take place mostly in the evenings, once or twice a week, or even at longer intervals, according to the leisure which their occupation allows them.[2] Young pupils who live in the neighbourhood attend their classes daily while living with their family. Pupils whose family live some distance away will stay in the house of the teacher as members of his household.

875 The teacher of the Koran may not demand special payment for the 874 tuition; according to Mohammedan principles religious instruction must be free—*ebo albarka*, 'for the sake of blessing'. The wealthy Mallam, in fact, scorns all such payments as contrary to the spirit of religion. The poorer Mallam depends on what the family of the pupil offers him as *sádaka*, alms: a penny or twopence every two months, or a bundle of grain (worth 9*d*. or 1*s*.) once a year. Even these small gifts are very irregular; in the school of a Bida Mallam of good reputation, whose pupils numbered thirteen, half of the parents had sent nothing for over a year. Sometimes it happens that a boy's father dies while the boy is still studying, and his relations are unwilling to pay for his education. In this case the Mallam will continue to teach the orphan, let him live in his house and give him food and clothing, again *ebo albarka* only. Koran teachers in the country are worse off than their colleagues in Bida. In Kacha a Mallam who taught Hausa and arithmetic in addition to the Koran and 'knowledge', and who had eight young and fifteen adult students, received no payment from his students except an occasional gift of kola-nuts. If he asked for money, the students would indignantly threaten to leave and to seek another teacher. But both poor and wealthy Mallams receive a final gift from the parents of the student who has completed his studies, either money (in Bida), between 5*s*. and 10*s*., or (in the village) grain or a goat. The teachers can also obtain a certain indirect remuneration by letting their pupils work for them. School-work does not take up the whole day, nor every day in the week. In their

[1] The Education Department in Bida has arranged special evening classes for these enterprising Koran school teachers, and gives them also certain practical assistance, for example, by supplying them with blackboards. This scheme of adult education is of considerable value in the spreading of elementary education among that section of the population which has not had the advantage of education in the Government schools.

[2] Students in a Koran school in Kacha, who were canoe-men by profession, [505] attended the school whenever they returned to Kacha from their voyages, interrupting their classes for weeks and months at a time when they were out on a canoe expedition.

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in this or other female professions; all these things I found in fact to be true of the *Sagis* I met. And I would conclude further, that the position of leadership among the women who practise a trade or profession is apt to be identified with power of witchcraft, as the whole market organization of the women is in a sense identified with the fantasy organization of witches. So that the economic independence of women, which is so largely a moral independence as well, seems to furnish the logical basis for the ascription of witchcraft. Let me break off at this point, which we shall reach again by a different route.

2. MALE AND FEMALE WITCHES

The Nupe text from which we started requires a final correction. Its summary assumption that only women are witches is somewhat inexact. Women alone are *evil* witches, who would desire to do all the things that witches are supposed to do; but there exist also male witches, who are in some measure their partners in crime. They are odd partners: they do not work evil themselves; they do not go out on the nightly search for human victims; on the contrary, the male witches are said to be 'good' people, who would curb the evil desires of the women. Yet precisely the most sinister effect of witchcraft, the killing of the victim (as against merely weakening his health), is thought to depend on the co-operation of both sexes.

We note the exact parallel to the two fatal 'diseases of God', leprosy and sleeping sickness. There, too, the two sexes appear as the two components of the supernatural threat, which is less grave if one alone is involved, and deadly only when the two are combined; and there, too, the female agent plays the decisive part. In the sphere of witchcraft, that part stands for the active evil will; while the role of the male agent is merely permissive or perhaps negative, that is, consists in *not* willing that the evil intentions be frustrated.

Thus far all Nupe are agreed. But on all other details concerning the alleged partnership of men and women opinions are once more divided. Only in Beni country and around Kutigi are the male witches called by a special name, *eshe*; elsewhere one uses *gaci*, and specifies the sex if necessary. If this is not done, the word is taken to refer to women. Most people hold that the male witches are much fewer in number than the female ones; thus it is thought that all the witches in a village, or seven, or three, share one male helper. They would visit him at night to solicit his help; but while some think that it is only the *fifingi* of man and woman who meet in this fashion, others are certain that it is the real persons who do

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The second legend, apart from being more widely known, is also more precise in its 'historical' allusions, naming the Nupe king in whose reign the critical events are said to have occurred; he is the same *Etsu* Shago whose reign saw the discovery of *cigbe*.[1] At the time, the people lived a lawless life, behaving insolently and 'refusing to listen to the Great Men'. Men would steal each other's wives and commit adultery without shame. The older women, especially, caused much trouble; they quarrelled among themselves and 'gave no peace'. The more law-abiding among the men grew angry and spoke harshly to the women; but these 'replied with insolence'. To continue *verbatim*: Now there was a young man, who had great strength. He set out and went into the bush. He then covered his head with cloth, like this (here the informant veiled his head with his gown, holding its end above his head, imitating the cloth mask of the *ndakó gboyá*). He reached the place where the women were causing a disturbance and yelled thus—'*Yi-i-i-i*' (the cry of the *ndakó gboyá*). When the women heard him they fled in fear. But one old woman did not run away. The old men also came, they waited for the woman to give way until they were tired: but she did not run away. The younger ones had all fled and left her alone. Thereupon the old men said to her—'*ezo, ezo*' (the ritual salute of the *ndakó gboyá*).[2] Thus they caught the woman. At last they killed her with an iron rod (*sãyi*). The men said: 'Even though she saw the *kuti* she did not run away; thus she was killed.'

We note two things: in the legend the evilness of the women implies striking at men or at least at their authority; also, the truly evil woman is pictured as old and as older than her victim or the man helpless against her (the king in the first legend and the young man in the second). On both points the legends side with the practice rather than with the theory of witchcraft, that is, with the concrete accusations, not with the formulated belief. According to the latter, the witch attacks human life at large, not only men, and she can be young or old, married or unmarried. The concrete case histories, however, show that the majority of victims are males, and usually younger men who have fallen under the influence of an older woman, who is then readily identified as the witch; while the alleged witch is always married, and often middle-aged or old. There is a further cleavage between 'theory' and 'practice'. As will be remembered, our text suggested that witches attack their own kin only exceptionally. This notion is

[1] See above, p. 17.

[2] This is not strictly correct. '*Ezo*' is the salute of the *gunnu* priest, but it is here used as though it belonged to the *ndakó gboyá* cult. These and other references to the cult will become clear later (see below, pp. 190 *et seq.*).

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further elaborated in popular belief; for it is generally held that a witch who would attack her own flesh and blood cannot do so alone but must enlist the help of other witches, not related to the victim. Kinship, then, in some measure deflects and frustrates the evil designs of witches. It is in fact true that witches are only rarely accused of harming their own blood relations; I recorded only two cases of this kind, both referring to the witch's own children. But the victims are not necessarily strangers; as often they are affinal relations of the woman witch (her son-in-law, her husband, his brother or the brother's children, or the husband's children by another wife).

From this varied evidence the following picture of the witch emerges: she is the enemy of men and of male authority; she seeks to dominate men; her evilness is somehow bound up with married state and occasionally with old age, that is, age beyond child-bearing; and her evilness is often directed against a husband and his kin. Now all these traits fall into place against the background of that other belief which links witchcraft with the economic position of the women; for seen against this background, and allowing for the fantasy disguise, the witch is accused of doing mystically precisely what the women, in virtue of their economic power, are accused of doing in real life. So that the witchcraft beliefs and fears paraphrase a true state of affairs and the anxieties and frustrations arising from it. Consider, then, for a moment that 'true state of affairs'.

To begin with, a great many Nupe men, peasants as well as craftsmen or members of the 'free professions' in the town, are heavily in debt to their trader-wives, on whom they often have to rely for money for tools, for some unforeseen heavy expenditure, and even for such items as the brideprice of a son or funeral expenses, which it is the man's duty to defray. If this dependence on the wife must detract from the man's proper status as the 'breadwinner', his authority is seriously diminished also by another factor. In the Nupe kinship organization most rights and obligations descend in the paternal line; and as sons (to a lesser extent, daughters) derive their kin group membership (membership of a particular 'house') from their fathers, have a place in their father's home and labour team, and inherit his property, land or profession, so they normally look to him or his male kin for economic support. But where the mother is the richer, the inheritance she will leave will be at least as important, and even while she is still alive her sons or daughters will turn to her for financial help. Frequently, in fact, the mother will pay directly, and not only through loans made to her husband, for a son's marriage, buy him clothes or luxuries, or shoulder the cost of a more expensive

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education. Let me make it clear that the mother is always expected to do the best for her children, and to pamper them in small matters, by giving them sweets, tasty tit-bits, and occasional presents. Nor is her more consequential economic help strictly unexpected and against the rule: but it is a rule of *faute de mieux*, whose coming into play inevitably connotes the failure of the more basic rule, that it is the father's role to meet the economic requirements of the household. Here, as in the instance mentioned before, the economic independence of the women connotes the inadequacy of the men.

There is a further point, already touched upon in a previous context. In Nupe, the women traders are proverbially 'bad' wives and 'bad' women, that is, women of loose and immoral character. Going on long journeys as they regularly do, they neglect their household duties and, while away from home, live the life of prostitutes. This is true even of the many women who only visit the market in the town, the Bida night market being a recognized place of assignation. All this is bad enough in the case of childless women; but in their case such immoral conduct is condoned, if with a shrug of the shoulders. As proverbial, however, as the moral laxity of the women traders is their desire to avoid having children. It is they who are the most regular customers of the various dealers in 'contraceptives'. They thus pile one iniquity upon another, having chosen not only unchastity but that utterly unnatural and despicable thing, voluntary barrenness.

Whether the woman exceeds the proper role of a wife and mother or rejects it, in part or entirely, she has successfully set aside a believed-in social norm. Now, this is no longer an instance of social abnormality, rather the opposite, if by 'normality' we mean all that is common, usual, expected: but it is a normality one hates and regrets, and contrasts with a desired state of affairs unhappily uncommon. This is borne out in every conversation; in the many quarrels between husbands and wives; in the many divorces and separations (and equally in the resigned attitude of husbands); in the comments of the medicine experts which we quoted before; in nostalgic talks of the men about a happier past when 'women knew their place'; and in the exclusion of unchaste and childless women from religious ceremonials.

This, then, is a clash between ideal and reality. But it is in no sense seen as fortuitous or transitory, as the result of some unfortunate maladjustment which could have been avoided and can conceivably be set right if one only made the effort. The harking-back to 'the good old days' is merely an escape from a reality which one is helpless to alter. For no one speaks about a future when everything should be better than it is now; and though the

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impact of alien influences and the vast increase in trade and traffic in the last few decades may well have aggravated the situation, all the available evidence (of genealogies and life histories) proves that the morals of women and the fate of marriages were, for the last four or five generations at least, much what they are today. Nor is this harking-back more than half-hearted; no one would claim that there was a time when all women were chaste and submissive, when they did not trade and earn money, and when contraceptive practices were unknown. Indeed such a claim, were it ever made, would be belied by the character of the *gunnu* ritual and by various legends and stories. Briefly, for the people the ideal was always out of step with the reality; so that we must judge this conflict to be inherent in the make-up of the society, whose economic system (which has certain moral consequences) is as unquestioned as are its ethical conceptions (which condemn these consequences).

This is important: for it is the inescapable nature of the conflict which finds expression in the belief in women witches. Nupe society, forced into an ambivalent attitude towards the role of women, which it cannot but accept and cannot but hate and call evil, also ascribes to them the powers of witchcraft. The coincidence as such is a matter of observed fact. But we can go further, and interpolate the psychological mechanism which turns the coincidence into a causal nexus, and hence enables us to call one thing the 'cause' and the other the 'symptom'. The mechanism is familiar: it lies in the projection of internal conflicts and of the frustrations so caused upon an external agent, real or imaginary. In our case, the awareness of an ideal state disturbed fastens upon the successful disturber; the helplessness in the face of a threatening situation turns into the positive fear of persons; and while one is incapable of dealing with the situation, one can at least deal with concrete individuals, whom one can accuse, persecute, and punish. So that in being made the witches of the society, the women are made to carry its fault or failure.

It is clear that this explanation holds good only on the assumption that the beliefs in witchcraft have been fashioned by men; for on almost every point we argued from a male standpoint. The legitimacy of this assumption need hardly be defended. The assertion of mundane morality, through legal institutions, falls to the men exclusively; above all, Nupe religion, its practices and doctrine, are fundamentally a male concern; and as it is the men who know and speculate about religion and have charge of the transmission of religious knowledge, so the notions of witchcraft must have been their creation. Situations of this kind are of course common; a great many societies are in this sense men-made and men-run; and if, like Nupe, they also afford considerable initiative and import-

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ance to women, they often, once more like Nupe, take back with one hand what they give with the other, that is, punish the permitted presumption by producing some belief in female witchery (whether taken literally or not).

But the male standpoint does not hold throughout; for the Nupe condemnation of voluntary sterility represents the women's judgment as much as the men's. From earliest youth the women accept child-bearing as the mission of their sex. If later in life they deny it, they deny what they know to be 'human nature': hence their furtive dealings with the medicine-man abortionist and the admitted shamefulness of this traffic. Let me stress that this means more than an attempt to evade the moral judgments of others. The Nupe woman has her lovers openly, and as openly flaunts her wealth and independence, the adverse moral judgments of the men notwithstanding. So that, in hiding the shame of not wanting children she hides a shame of which she is aware and a guilt which she accepts. This guilt is probably shared much more widely; for every woman who takes concrete steps to avoid child-bearing there must be another who at least harbours the secret desire. However this may be, like the frustration of the men, the guilt of the women, open or secret, is projected into the picture of the female witch. For the women equally accept this picture. Though they may not have created the witchcraft beliefs, they yet have a hand in transmitting them and keeping them alive; at least, they share in gossip of this kind, if less openly than the men, and fabricate such stories. Whenever they do, they speak as accusers, vehemently denying that the role of the witch could apply to them. Even so, they accuse their own sex and, circuitously, themselves.[1]

The men, then, in the witchcraft fantasies, condemn an antagonist; the women, in the same vicarious fashion, condemn their own guilt. In the concrete punishment, however, which witches are expected to suffer the male standpoint once more emerges paramount. It is the men alone who battle with witches, defeat and chastise them, through the male society of *ndakó gboyá*, as it is also the men who, in the legends about witchcraft, are credited with the discovery of this weapon; and this, as we shall see, is employed, not only to trace and punish the culprits, but also to threaten and to subdue the womenfolk at large.

There is a certain twist to this picture of male vengeance. In the legends the men, in the person of the diviner and the 'old man', are straightforward destroyers of witches. But general

[1] Margaret Mead has drawn attention to the nexus between witchcraft beliefs and willed female sterility (see *Male and Female*, 1949, pp. 232–3). Her views, stated in a broader context, bear out much of what I have tried to say.

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belief assigns to them a more ambiguous role, holding that some —the diviners, medicine-men, and 'male witches'—also assist the female witch and hence become her partners in crime. This may still seem to be only a fantasy paraphrase or 'projection' of real life, where the man's role is similarly ambiguous; for he will both claim domestic authority and surrender it, thus so-to-speak aiding and abetting the female ambitions. In a more subtle sense, however, the witchcraft fantasies stand for the triumph of the male. Consider that the woman witch, to be successful, must make a compact with men—diviners, *cigbeciži* or male witches. Her fullest, that is, deadly powers depend on male aid, so that the men can curb her activities and frustrate her designs. Indeed one firmly clings to the belief that this is nearly always so, and that the male witch is 'good' and the female alone 'evil'. If a few men, whom no one can name, are willing to 'aid and abet' women witches, they have as it were betrayed their own sex; even so, their help has to be begged by the female witch. In brief, the men, victims of female ascendancy in real life and victims of female witchcraft in fantasy, are on the same fantasy plane also the masters of the women; and if in one sense female evilness may prevail, in another it exists on sufferance, subject to male permission and, ultimately, revenge.

So understood, the fantasy picture of witchcraft conjures up a relationship between the sexes which reverses reality, putting power for helplessness and dominance for submission. The projection of the conflict between reality and ideal thus merges with its resolution in terms of a wish-fulfilment. We conclude that Nupe witchcraft beliefs afford a double relief: the frustrations caused by a hated 'normality' are not only externalized so that they can be vented on concrete victims, but also spirited away and compensated in fantasy.

Both the projective mechanism and this other mechanism of 'compensation', which we interpolated between 'cause' and 'symptom', between certain conflicts and frustrations and the belief in female witchcraft, operate unconsciously, though the conflicts and frustrations themselves are fully conscious. But it might be asked if the 'causes', too, are not likely to reach down into the unconscious and to a level deeper than that represented by conflicts over authority, kinship position, or morality. These are all motives entailed in a particular social organization. And since the belief in female witchcraft is widespread throughout human society it would seem legitimate to search also for a cause of a more fundamental order, over and above those peculiar to this one type of society. The Nupe witchcraft beliefs, with their dichotomy of 'good' male and 'evil' female witches, indeed seem to point in that direction, towards some basic antagonism of the sexes.

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To substantiate this hypothesis I may be allowed to digress a little. It is, I think, true to say that man surrenders to woman his virility in the sex-act and his independence and self-containedness in the love relationship; the fulfilment of his desires is thus bought with the sacrifice of Ego-completeness. If we take this sacrifice to be unconsciously hateful, as I think we must, and accept this ambivalence of love-hatred as the source of an inescapable antagonism having no normal or legitimate outlet, then the belief in female witches (of the Nupe or any other people) represents a 'displacement' and licensed expression of the repressed hatred. The phrase 'having no normal outlet' requires some comment. Different cultures fashion the normal social relationship between the sexes in widely diverse ways, as has been amply demonstrated in the work of Margaret Mead. But few societies can by this means fully resolve the conflict of sex antagonism. If the society makes the men the socially dominant sex, it is able to compensate for the surrender of virility but fails to express the importance of the woman as sexual partner and procreatrix, and hence invites male fears of female revenge; and if the social dominance of men is reduced, either by design (as in some societies) or in consequence of uncontrollable social processes (as in Nupe), this produces the kind of situation we have been discussing. There is some evidence that a carefully balanced relationship between the sexes can avoid this impasse.[1] But where it does not, the psychological mechanism of projection, with its offer of vicarious or fantasy hatreds, comes into play.

Now this is only a bare formula, couched in terms of universal validity. Let me fill it in with details from Nupe society. To begin with, the 'surrender' and loss of 'completeness' on the part of the men may be felt more strongly in some societies than in others, that is, reach consciousness to a different degree. The Nupe men, certainly, make much of the physically weakening effects of sexual intercourse, and teach the younger generation to husband their strength; they also, as we know, readily employ aphrodisiacs and so betray their fear of the loss of potency. At the same time, they will comment on the sexual voraciousness of the women, who never seem to have enough lovers. The Nupe, incidentally, do not conceive of erotic relationships that could avoid this threat to their virility: homosexuality among the men does not seem to occur and is thought absurd as well as repulsive. Yet again, homosexuality does occur among the women, which fact is well known to the men.[2] For the Nupe, then, the woman is more 'complete'

[1] See my chapter on 'Dual Descent in the Nuba Hills', in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, ed. A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 1950, pp. 354 ff.
[2] See *A Black Byzantium*, p. 152.

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in herself than the man and her sex less vulnerable; above all, her satisfaction, more insatiable than the man's, threatens his virility. So that everything we said before, in general terms, about male 'surrender' and 'incompleteness' is sharply accentuated in Nupe culture.

Everything, too, reappears, appropriately rephrased, in the witchcraft fantasies: witches feed on the life and strength of a man as women do on his virility; and his anxieties are allayed or compensated in a wish-fulfilment which sees the female witch incomplete, possessed only of half her power without a help she must beg of men.[1]

Admittedly, the witchcraft legends fail to corroborate this view, containing nothing that could be construed into a reference to the sexual dominance of women. Rather on the contrary: in the first legend the witch is a 'mother' dominating her son; and though the second legend enlarges upon the licentiousness and sexual greed of the young women, the really dangerous 'witch' is pictured as an old hag against whom younger men are helpless. But the aspect of female dominance is there; and if it is removed from the sphere of sex it is brought closer to the overt anxieties and frustrations of the Nupe men. They face precisely this threat, from 'mothers' who assume an illegitimate power in the family, and from overbearing women who abandon their role of partners in marriage. Perhaps the 'old woman' too fits into the picture; for being 'old' means being beyond child-bearing; so that the figure of a woman who has left child-bearing behind would seem to stand for all the women who reject it. If then, the legends fail to express the antagonism between the sexes in its basic and universal form, they express instead the immediate, concrete conflicts of the society. In other words, of two possible motivations the legends embody one.

This leads me to my final point. This new explanation, in terms of a basic sex antagonism, neither overrules nor clashes with those previously suggested, in terms of other motivations. Rather, they are all valid, relating to different aspects or elements of that total phenomenon, the Nupe witchcraft beliefs. It is indeed a fundamental feature of social phenomena, if they are of any complexity, that they tend to embody a plurality of motives, belonging to varying levels of human concern, impulse, and consciousness. Our several explanations reflect this plurality of motives; more pre-

[1] I am aware that psycho-analysts may read the facts differently and relate the fantasy picture of female witches to a love-hatred of women which has its roots in the man's mother-imago, or in the conflict between 'tenderness' and 'sexuality' in love, or perhaps in the sadistic components of the sex act. I will only say, briefly, that my analysis of Nupe society does not bear out these alternative explanations.

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cisely, there had to be three explanations, corresponding to different levels of motivation, which are levels of generality as well. The first was concerned with the ascription of witchcraft to concrete individuals: this we related to the overt value judgments of the people, that is, to the conscious assessment of socially desirable conduct and character traits. The second explanation was concerned with the ascription of witchcraft to the female sex: here the processes creative of the belief were unconscious though set in motion by judgments on socially desirable behaviour and by the conscious conflict between ideal and reality. The third explanation, once more concerned with the ascription of witchcraft to women, was in terms of unconscious impulses springing from an unconscious conflict: and this we took to be determined, no longer by particular social circumstances, but by events on that 'deeper level' on which sex antagonism, in man everywhere, has its play. There is perhaps a further, most general level of enquiry; for we may clearly ask why there should be witchcraft at all? why people should believe in such a deadly evil inexorably vested in some of their kind? This question must for the moment be postponed.

4. SYMPTOMATOLOGY: CASE HISTORIES

As has been said, only a witch, or a person possessing the appropriate *cigbe*, is able to tell a witch; others can only suspect the presence of witchcraft, however reliable the indications. The clues employed in this work of detection are similarly divided, into esoteric signs visible only to the fellow witch or sorcerer, and the crude indications which everyone can read. The former are, needless to say, entirely intangible and mystical. Thus at night you may see witches breathe fire (if you are yourself a witch); if a lesser witch meets a more powerful one, tears will spring to the eyes of the former; witches, finally, see one another in their dreams. Persons possessing a *cigbe* which makes them like witches should also be able to see or recognize them, and such medicines, as I have said, are in fact produced; but a few sceptics dismiss these claims as so much idle talk. It is a highly qualified scepticism, casting no doubts on the witchcraft beliefs as such. The Master of the *cigbeciki* summed it up most clearly, in this analogy: 'We see the lightning; we say *Sokó* causes it: but has anyone seen him do it? So we see what witches do, but who says he has seen a witch is lying.' The mystery which surrounds the manner of beholding witches extends also to their appearance; for the Nupe have no clear picture of what a witch looks like save that she looks horrid and fearful.

Though ordinary persons cannot see witches, dogs and cats can,

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doctrine and uniformly transmitted through the teaching of the Qoran, even this teaching can vary within wide limits; above all, it can be reinforced or belied by the models of practical conduct exhibited by the teachers. Thus we shall presently speak of the confused notions of the Nupe on Moslem cosmology and hagiology, and of their lack of interest in the historical background of Islam. But how far this attitude reflects the Nupe reaction towards the new creed or merely their faithful acceptance of a creed loosely and confusedly taught, it is obviously difficult to say. Quite probably the latter is the true picture; for there is no reason to assume that the first emissaries of Islam were more erudite or theologically-minded than the majority of mallams today. According to some accounts, in fact, the famous Mallam Dendo was little better than a peddler of Mohammedan charms. However this may be, when it comes to the general moral precepts or codes of conduct that go with Islam, we are more uncertain still. Islam reached Nupe through many hands and by many stages, and in a form probably considerably affected by the modes of life of the Sudanese and West African societies where it first took root. Furthermore, many of these are closely akin to Nupe. If then, we find Moslem practices more or less closely attuned to Nupe traditional culture, this may only represent some previous 'remodelling' and, from Nupe point of view, a fortuitous correspondence, not any effort on their part to render the new creed more 'congenial'.

Let me illustrate this by one example, the position of women in Moslem-Nupe society. In orthodox Islam the woman is man's inferior by the will of God, and made to obey him (*Surah* IV). Though women may be as true believers, they are permitted no share in religious activities and rarely given the chance of religious tuition. Legally and socially they are subjected to various disabilities; women (not men) must 'observe continence and not display their ornaments' (that is, must be veiled before strangers—*Surah* XXV, 31); and Mohammedans marrying 'infidel' women must not let 'them go back to the infidels', being responsible for their spiritual welfare (*Surah* LX, 10). None of these tenets applies to Nupe Islam. Women are as free as men and legally as fully qualified; the veiling of the women is unknown; and though the Nupe do not admit women to the mosque or other religious observances, girls of the upper classes are often taught the Qoran. Is this, then, an adjustment of Islam to traditional Nupe notions? Hardly that, for this contrast is true only in comparison with Moslem practices, say in India or the urban society of Arabia and the Eastern Sudan. It disappears when we compare Nupe with the nomadic Moslem tribes in the Sudan or with the Mohammedan Emirates in the north of Nigeria. The Fulani invaders of Nupe,

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794 who started the great wave of Islamization, were probably as liberal or unorthodox in their attitude to women. So that the 562 Nupe would have received their new creed already remodelled by the donors, and the true contrast would be, not between orthodox Islam and the Nupe version, but between the former and African Islam.

794 To turn to the other aspects of the Moslem 'way of life', first, to the high value placed on scholarship. Even the most humble 875 follower of Islam is aware of it. Tuition in the creed and *jĩ katũ* (reading, book-knowledge in general) are to him almost one and the same thing; and greater religious perfection coincides with wider learning. The title mallam, 'scholar', freely accorded to the pious, already indicates the trend of thought. One mallam friend of mine expressed it aptly when he spoke of the *ciɣwa katũ*, the 'greatness of learning', which makes any Mohammedan scholar equal to the other great ones in the country—rankholders, noblemen, or wealthy landowners. Not that the mallam is necessarily poor or a commoner; many mallams are wealthy, and many members of the titled aristocracy pride themselves on being scholars as well. But the professional scholar does not require the badge or rank nor the backing of wealth to be granted the privileges of high status. His learning makes him the companion of the 'great ones'; his ministration at naming ceremonies, weddings or burials opens him their houses; and even a poor mallam can marry into rich or noble families if his scholarly repute is high; for in this case the bride's father will defray the costs of the brideprice, counting this expenditure as a pious gift of alms.[1]

There are, of course, degrees of learning, and hence distinctions in the status of mallams. In largely pagan villages anyone who has learned to recite a few *surat* of the Qoran and performs his daily prayers is called a mallam; in the Mohammedan capital the name is reserved for those who also teach the Qoran, though the adepts in the art of sand-divining and the sellers of charms are equally included in that class. Mostly a further distinction is drawn between the simple, humble mallam, who knows only the Qoran (or, more often, only small portions of it) and the true scholar, who must have studied *litafi* (books) or *kpikpe* (knowledge) as well. Men of the latter class read eagerly and widely, and acquire books where they can or copy out rare manuscripts. Ignoring, however, the few mallams who practice as judges and have studied the various relevant legal digests and commentaries, the reading of these 'learned men' tends to be indiscriminate and their 'know-

[1] The social position of the mallams and the whole question of Moslem learning and tuition has been fully discussed in *A Black Byzantium*; see especially pp. 102, 378–83.

423 larly bitter in Bida. In the area west of the Kaduna River, there was less appropriation and there is less pressure on land. Land tenure is on a traditional tribal or village basis; there is no severe competition for possession and land disputes are rare.

[562] 425 Traditionally men only could hold land; acquisition by women is still comparatively rare and occurs only around Bida. Rights may be acquired in various ways:

(1) By a member of a non-land-owning family exercising his right as a member of the village community; land thus acquired is inalienable.

(2) By short-term lease from an individual land-holder for two to five years; this method is known as *aro* (" borrowing "); land thus acquired is also inalienable.

(3) By a member of a land-owning family exercising his claim, on his marriage, to part of the land held by the family.

(4) By a stranger adopted into the household, in the same manner as (3).

(5) By lease for an indefinite period, against payment plus rent in kind; this has now become tantamount to purchase.

(6) By hereditary tenantship; no rent is paid but a share in the produce is given.

(7) By " primary " tenantship; rights are ceded to another in recognition of services rendered, but the tenant must provide a share of the produce. If the primary tenant is not himself a farmer, as is often the case among members of the Nupe nobility, he will sub-let the land for a high initial fee and rent in kind.

423 471 Village land is held and apportioned by the chief. It is of three types:

(1) Land in the hands of families or individuals, whether worked or fallow (*lati*).

(2) Vacant land which has reverted to the chief for future allotment (*gonta*).

(3) The fringe of " reserve " land or bush, the boundaries of which are unmarked (*cika*).

Village land rarely stretches more than three miles from the village. Small individual plots (*bucá*) are mainly near the village; larger family plots of 12–16 acres (*efakó*) are generally farther afield. Family plots do not all lie near together. Land is not fenced except on the marshland plots near Kacha.

No fruit trees on village land may be cut down without the permission of the head, who has a special right to all fruit-bearing trees. Shea-nut trees on vacant land are common property, and women collect the fruit and share it. Shea-nut trees on occupied farmland belong to the owner of the farm. Farm plots in the village itself are owned by the people living in the compound adjoining the plot; they are apportioned and inherited within the houses and never left uncultivated.[50]

Tenure of fishing pools is important among riverain groups. Among the Batači every pool has a name and a specific owner. A pool may be owned by the village collectively or by an individual or it may be attached to a title and change ownership with it. Pools owned by individuals can be inherited. Rents are fixed by custom and do not vary from year to year; yearly fishing rights may be bought by individuals.[51] Strangers in Kede district seek formal permission to fish from the *Kuta*, through the village head in whose area they settle. The period of settlement varies from a few months to about three years, but there is no permanent settlement. Presents of fish may be made to the village head and the *Kuta*, or strangers' tax paid to the Bida Treasury.[52]

[431] 651

[50] Nadel, 1942, pp. 180–204; Temple, 1919, p. 331.

[51] Prices given in the appendix to the Notes on Kede District (1950) vary between 2s. 6d. and £2.

[52] Notes on Kede District, 1950.

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SLAVERY

567 Slaves attached to the royal house and the nobility could rise to positions of wealth and influence, and some of the former titled court slaves have in recent times become Native Authority officials. Slaves had a certain measure of social and economic independence; though female slaves had no income and their earnings belonged to their master, they might become the concubines of a free man and be given their freedom. Any children born would in any case be free. Male slaves could seek to purchase their independence.

Slaves were obtained both by capture in war and by purchase in the Bida market. Owners had the power of life and death over slaves, though in practice they rarely maltreated them. Indeed, when slavery was abolished, many former slaves elected to remain as unpaid servants with their former masters. Children born to a man's slaves were called *mangi* (" children of the house ") and could not be sold, maltreated, or killed. They were brought up as members of the household but were not entitled to a share in the master's inheritance. A master would, however, provide the marriage payment for a marriage arranged by him for one of his slaves with another slave.[33]

PAWNING

426 558 The practice of pawning human pledges grew to enormous proportions before its final suppression in 1933–34. Under the pressure of unexpected or imperative demands, one person in a family, preferably a male, would be pawned for 5–10 years. Pawning was regarded as a disgrace and the pawns were looked down on by their masters and even by the household slaves.[34]

POSITION OF WOMEN

562 Women's activities, other than household tasks, include spinning, weaving, cooking cakes for sale in the market, and hairdressing (a lucrative profession). Women are also doctors and traders, though those whose professional duties keep them away from home for long periods are commonly regarded as " loose " women. They collect the produce of all trees except palm-oil and kola; they cultivate and sell groundnuts and root crops and help to trade some of the men's crops.

A woman's earnings as a trader cannot be touched by her husband, but remain her property until her death, when he inherits them. Among commoners a woman is often better-off than her husband and may lend him money for taxes and the purchase of tools, and even provide for marriages and funerals. The inter-sex hostility, which has been accentuated by the economic independence and consequent sexual freedom of women, also shows itself in the Nupe conception of witchcraft, where a witch is thought to do mystically what a woman actually does in everyday life.[35]

562 565 The most important women's titles are those of *nimwoye*, of the royal house of Masaba, and *sagi*, of the royal houses of Umaru and Usman Zaki alternatively. Quarrels between women are brought before women holding these titles and the women of Bida town and the villages bring them gifts. *Sagi* is also the title of the " head of the women " in every Nupe village. The chief woman commoner in Bida has the title of *sonya;* she organizes all large-scale women's work and is entrusted with the supervision of the market. She is now an official of the Native Administration, receiving a small salary. The status of a woman by descent is not 554 reduced on marriage, since Nupe class sentiments cannot admit a lowering of the status of anyone high-born.[36]

[33] Nadel, 1942, pp. 102–8, 157.
[34] Ibid., pp. 311–13.
[35] Nadel, 1954a, pp. 172–81.
[36] Nadel, 1942, pp. 331–4, 147–56; Temple, 1919, p. 326.

4: Temple G-4 (no date) 1922

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The successor's initiatory act is to go to the tombs of each of his predecessors, where he offers prayer at the head of his people. He would have three compounds to visit, the burial place of each of the three family branches, one sepulchre being in his own palace, as the Chief resides in his own family mansion. 643

The Nupe King, entitled Etsu in pre-Filane days, now Emir of Bida, has been a Muhammadan for some centuries and Koranic law is, therefore, observed, but as it has been modified since the advent of the British the following relates to the system of punishment in vogue before that time. All cases were then, as now, decided by the Alkali in court, and he informed the Emir of all important sentences. If there were doubt as to the guilt of the accused the Alkali would sometimes summon a Mallam with the gift of second sight to assist him, but he would never fail to come to a decision. Boys under seventeen were not considered adult, and were not subject to courts of law, but were punished at home by their fathers or guardians—and the same applied to unmarried women. 671 696 [884 672]

The theft of any food stuff eaten on the spot was considered no offence, but if any objects worth 1,250 cowries (=6d.) or more were stolen the thief had his hand cut off, for a second offence his foot, for a third offence his second hand, for a fourth, his second foot. It is so much recognised as a brand, that an innocent man who has to have his hand amputated always has it done at the elbow. If, however, there were extenuating circumstances, if it was a first offence, and the man pleaded guilty, he might be let off altogether, or imprisoned. Theft between husband and wife is considered no offence. If the value of goods taken was 10,000 cowries or more his head was cut off, and the same punishment was inflicted for highway robbery with violence. If no bodily hurt were done, imprisonment was substituted for any term up to four years. 685 [435] 683

For assault a fine of 50,000 cowries was levied.

For resisting a dogarai, or officer of the Alkali's court, a fine of 100,000 cowries upwards was imposed.

Injudicious talk was punished by cutting off the mouth and ears.

Murder was punished by decapitation. 682

Sentences of death were carried out by dogarai, who buried the bodies, unless the families sent for them. 696 [66]

Adultery was heavily punished in old days, but not now. Married women were liable to law. They suffered imprisonment inside the Alkali's compound, in compliance with Muhammadan decorum, and a murderess was put in a pit (in this compound), from which her head alone emerged, and was kept there without food or water till she died, for a woman might not be killed! There were but few women criminals, as crime is ground for divorce, and it is hard for a criminal to get another husband. 684 [562] 586

462 The Nupe women have many occupations besides the ordinary household duties. Her obligations as a wife are to prepare the food, and bring firewood and water. They spin, weave, cook little cakes for the market, or practise hair-dressing, a lucrative profession, for a reputed coiffeuse receives 6d. to 1s. a head, according to the elaboration of the dressing, though no client presents herself more than once every moon. There are also women doctors, who attend both male and female patients, and receive the same fees that a man doctor would do. The Nupe women are above all things traders, and will often travel great distances on this behest. On these occasions they are accompanied
463 by their husbands, but the first wife is left at home by right of
439 her position. Usually she prefers so to remain; if she rebels, her husband asks her not to come on account of the loss of dignity, but if she persists he yields. In the early days of her married life, before there are other wives and dependants, she may trade in the neighbourhood three months after her wedding, and when
[563] there are two wives the elder will often take it in turns to go out with the younger. At no time may she leave the compound, however, without her husband's permission.

462 The women do a good deal of out-door work. They collect
563 the produce of all trees, except palm-oil and kola trees, the former
439 of which were a reserve of the Emirs, but are now divided between the occupier and the Chief of the town, and the latter are kept by the men. These they may sell for their own benefit, after first deducting in every case what will be required by the household throughout the year. Women also cultivate and sell ground-nuts and all root-crops, such as ochro, which do not require transplanting. Men do all transplanting and, therefore, own such crops as cassava, sweet potatoes, onions, etc., but it is the women who have the right to sell them, and as they usually keep a commission of 25 per cent. it is a valuable right. If, however, a man finds he is being given unusually high prices he rewards his wife with a liberal gift of cloth. It is the man who tends and owns all grain and, therefore, sells it for himself, but he is thought ill of if he does not first consult his wives as to the price he is to accept for it. They sow the corn and help to garner it after it is reaped, and each woman has charge of so many bundles, as to the sale of which she must be consulted. She expects some small present for her trouble.

566 When a household becomes rich, that is to say when their
556 property, if sold, would realise £20 to £40, a number of people
736 of both sexes ask leave to become their dependants. The master of the house will take no children without the consent of their parents, but a poor man will frequently desire his protection for them. They are then treated as children of the house, they are given food and clothes, and when the time for marriage comes the master of the house provides the necessary money.

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He may go out to war himself, but more often puts the operations under the War-Chief, Sarkin Yaki, who is himself advised by the Wari-Yaki, a man chosen by the Mallamai for this purpose, and often of so humble a position that the warriors do not know who he is. The Sarkin Yaki, however, obeys him invariably, and indeed it is the Mallamai who direct when and where an attack should be delivered or a retreat made. If the Sarkin Yaki should be killed in war, the army retires to await another appointment by the Emir. It was the custom for the two eldest daughters of the Sarkin Nupe to go to war, each arrayed in two thick rigas, a cummerbund, and carrying a sword and spear. They had large followings, for they gave a big proportion of the spoils to their retinue, but they followed the direction of the Sarkin Yaki. No woman was allowed to accompany them into battle, but many of the sex were discontented with the restriction, and, in consequence, the practice became unpopular amongst the Nupe men. The general feeling became so strong that on the death of the Chief, Umoru Majigi, in 1884, these ladies were no longer allowed to go out to war. Their names were Atiba and Wodiko, names invariably given to the Chief's two eldest daughters. In other respects they lived ordinarily, and were married, but their husbands would never fight in the same war with their wives. Each Chieftain brings his following, and there are bodies of horsemen and footmen, the former armed with spears, the latter with bows and arrows. A war-camp is formed some seven to ten miles from where hostilities are expected to take place, and here the stores and women are left. The Mallamai and a large number of civilian hangers-on advance to the verge of the fight, and wait till success is attained, when they dash in to secure a share of the spoil, the Mallamai giving the word when it is safe to do so. Needless to say their presence is often resented. Envoys may be sent from one army to another in perfect safety, protected by the waving of a white flag, or of green branches; they generally dress in white for additional surety.

Before any campaign is undertaken the Emir consults a Mallam gifted with the power of prophecy, and he says whether the results would be good or bad. A hundred years ago the advent of a fair race from the west was foretold by the prophets in a MS. still extant, and the resistance to their arms was forbidden. That was why the present Emir of Bida and his family, together with all the Mallamai, refused to come out against the British. There are some prophets who are above worldly interest and desire, and others who give advice for 1,000 cowries, or perhaps sixpence. It is a special art in which they receive instruction as youths, and there are books on the subject. The Mallams are consulted on such questions as marriage, trade ventures, and sickness. They look on the ground for about ten minutes and

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A MONTHLY RECORD OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL SCIENCE

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE
ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

XXXV, 143-160 SEPTEMBER, 1935

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

Africa : West. With Plate I-J. Nadel.

131 **The King's Hangmen: a judicial organization in Central Nigeria.** *By Dr. S. F. Nadel.*

143

Travelling on the Niger in Nupe country, between Jebba in the North and Eggā in the South, one comes across a certain group of villages, curiously distinguished from the rest of the riverain villages by the special name which the Nupe have for them: they call them *ledu*, in the plural *leduzhi*, which means, literally, 'prison.'

I.

778 693 The common name stands for a common organization to which they all belong. And as an apt symbol for an organization expressed by such a name each of these villages possesses the same emblem: a sacred iron chain (fig. 2). As a rule this chain is kept in the chief's house, and only very [562] reluctantly would he show it as in fig. 4. At any rate, he would always make sure first that no woman (the anthropologist's wife included) is near the place when he brings it out into the daylight—for no woman is allowed to set eyes on this sacred implement. It is a heavy iron chain, often some 30 feet long, with strong leg- and arm-irons on it—what we should call a typical slave- or prison-chain. It is kept rolled up in a round wooden tray; but in one place, at Jebba, I found a railway wheel serving this purpose. The chain will always smell abominably, and will be covered with flies, the [782] unmistakable sign that the traditional sacrifice of beer, and blood of fowl, has been performed properly.

There exist altogether eight such *ledu* villages. They are distributed along the Niger banks in a surprisingly regular manner, always between 10 to 15 miles apart from one another. The names of the *ledu* villages, from north to south, are as follows: Jebba, Gbere (fig. 1), Tada, Jiragi, Sūlati, [103] Fofo, Tayi, Cewuru. Two *ledu* villages, Jebba and Tada—an offshoot of Jebba—possess, besides the chains, sacred bronze figures (fig. 3) which signify that these two villages are the 'old ones,' the heads [532] of the *ledu* organization. The chain itself is called *égbā Tsoede*—the 'chain of Tsoede'—and chains and figures are said to have been brought to these places by the mythical ancestor of Nupe kingdom, Tsoede.[1]

173 The many versions of the Tsoede tradition which exist in Nupe country differ in details only. The main facts are always the same: Tsoede was a Nupe man, who was sent as slave to the Atta (king) of Idah, at the time when the Nupe were tributary to Idah. From a slave Tsoede soon became the Atta's favourite and friend. Presented by the Atta with slaves, wealth and powerful magic, but envied by the Atta's relatives, he had to flee from Idah after the Atta's death. In a magical bronze canoe, one of the Atta's presents, he paddled up the Niger and finally reached Nupe country. Here he settled down, and amongst the people of his country he distributed his wealth, the insignia of his rulership, and the emblems of his powerful magic. Very soon he delivered Nupe country from

[1] According to Nupe etymology the name Tsoede is derived from *Etsu Ede*, or *'tsu Ede*, *i.e.*, king Ede. This explains the other name by which the culture hero of the Nupe is also known, *Edegi*.